

never forget those sacrifices—especially those of people like Philip Albert who have left us with a debt we can never repay.

I offer my deepest sympathies to Philip Albert's family, and to everyone who knew and loved him.

IN MEMORY OF PFC JEFFREY BRAUN

Mr. President, I also rise to speak in memory of PFC Jeffrey Braun, of Stafford, CT, who was killed in Iraq on December 11, 2003. He was 19 years old.

Private Braun was truly an inspiration to everyone who knew him. He joined the Army shortly after the attacks of September 11, motivated by a desire to be part of the global campaign to rid the world of terror. After completing his senior year at Stafford High School in 2002, he became a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division.

Jeff Braun's heroic sacrifice in Iraq will never be forgotten. But in the words of a friend, Adrian Scarpa, "He was a hero even before he went over."

No matter what he did, Jeff Braun was always striving to be part of something greater than himself. At Stafford High School, wherever you looked, you could find Jeff Braun. He played soccer, wrestled, and ran track. He sang, acted in school plays, and was active in local community service projects.

Jeff's friends and family members knew him as a young man who always had a kind word, a smile, and an outgoing and infectious sense of humor. He would make friends with classmates who were lonely. He would give away his own lunch to students who didn't have any.

Jeff Braun was a fascinating person, and he had a fascinating life story. He was born in the village of San Pedro Sula in Honduras. When he was 6 months old, he was adopted by Meredith and William Braun, who brought him to Stafford. He came to love his adopted country so much that he joined its armed forces. But he also shared a deep and meaningful connection with his homeland. Even while in Iraq, Jeff was actively pursuing his dream of building an orphanage in his native Honduras. It's a dream that Jeff's parents have said they will strive to make a reality.

Jeff didn't have to enlist in the military. But with his enthusiasm, his generosity, his spirit, and his character, he simply couldn't stay on the sidelines and watch as his fellow countrymen fought overseas in defense of freedom. Jeff saw a job that needed to be done—and he knew that he had to be a part of it.

I join the town of Stafford, the State of Connecticut, and the entire United States Senate in mourning the loss of Private Jeffrey Braun, a truly remarkable individual who was taken from us far, far too soon.

I offer my deepest sympathies to Jeff's parents William and Meredith, to his sister Julie, his entire family, and the many, many people whose lives were touched by Jeff Braun.

#### OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I see my good friend from Kentucky on the floor, and I want to take this moment to clarify a couple of funding issues in the Foreign Operations portion of the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

I notice that the conference report is silent on the issue of funding for Laos. Is it the chairman's intention that the administration should implement the language contained in the Senate Foreign Operations Appropriations Report, 108-106?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I thank the Senator from Vermont. Before I respond, I was wondering if he could take a moment to read the Senate report language for the benefit of our colleagues.

Mr. LEAHY. I would be happy to. It reads:

The Committee recommends that USAID provide \$2,000,000 in Child Survival and Health Programs Fund and Development Assistance to Laos—one of the world's poorest and most repressive countries—through non-governmental organizations. The Committee intends that these funds will not be used to offset or substitute INL funding that would otherwise go to Laos.

The Committee is concerned by the actions of the regime in Laos, which continues to be responsible for serious human rights abuses. The Committee is also concerned by the recent detention and trial of an American citizen and two foreign journalists in Laos. While the Committee is pleased that these individuals have recently been released, it is deeply troubled that the fate of four Laotian citizens accompanying the journalists is still unknown.

Mr. MCCONNELL. As I know my friend from Vermont is particularly interested in this issue, it would be both accurate and fair to say that it is our collective intention that this language be implemented.

Mr. LEAHY. I am pleased we are in agreement. As I know of your strong interest in the region, I hope we can continue to work together to support United States funded programs through Southeast Asia.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I look forward to our continued cooperation, and urge the State Department and USAID to meet with our respective staffs to discuss countries of particular concern, including Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma.

Mr. LEAHY. On the issue of Burmese refugees along the Thailand-Burma border, is it the chairman's expectation that funds from the ERMA account should be used to provide funding for these refugees?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Yes, it is. The situation on the Burma-Thailand border is disturbing, and if sufficient funds cannot be found from the MRA budget then the administration should consider using ERMA funds to ameliorate this situation.

Mr. LEAHY. I thank the Chairman.

#### BLACK ON BLACK CRIME PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. PRYOR. Mr. President, 1 year ago this month, a powerful new force

joined together and it has since swept through the neighborhoods in Arkansas. Its members said enough to the homicides plaguing our streets, enough to the violence in our schools and homes and enough to standing by to watch our communities crumble.

Members of the community saw that although African Americans comprised 12 percent of the national population, a staggering 45 percent of all murder victims in 2002 were black. A resounding 91 percent of those murders were incidents of black on black crime.

Homicide was and is still literally tearing apart African-American families, serving as the leading cause of death for black men ages 15 to 24, and the second leading cause of death for black women of the same age group. Black-on-black crime remains an epidemic, having a devastating impact on our families and ultimately compromising the safety and quality of life in my great State of Arkansas.

One year ago this month, community leaders, faith leaders, government officials, community organizations, and businesses did more than just say enough is enough. They formed the Black on Black Crime Coalition to inform and educate the citizens of Little Rock about black-on-black crime, but also to implement programs and initiatives to reduce homicides, reduce violent crimes and take back their streets and neighborhoods.

I am proud to be a partner of this coalition, to join with coalition members and its wide array of partners and raise public awareness about black-on-black crime. The coalition has spent its first year creating and supporting intervention and mentoring programs, conducting workshops for community organizations, supporting neighborhood associations, implementing youth programs and lobbying elected officials to implement policies for effective change. The coalition is working through the statistics, trying to understand the systemic causes, determining the solutions and reversing this epidemic that is stealing away our future leaders.

This January, in Arkansas, we celebrate Black on Black Crime Prevention Month. The coalition has organized a month filled with ceremonies, roundtable discussions, town meetings, and prayer to help meet its mission. By all means, these efforts are contributing to a better understanding of the challenges that Arkansas' black communities face each and every day, but we are also learning and implementing strategies to beat back and overcome these challenges.

As the former attorney general of my State, I have worked closely with law enforcement officers and the community to make Arkansas a safer place to live and raise a family. As a Senator, I have continued to fight for legislation, programs, technology and budgets to accomplish this goal. And I pledge to continue this commitment.

It is a tremendous responsibility that the Black on Black Crime Coalition